Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 4569 in an effort to stop a nationwide tree epidemic before it further infects America's forest and horticultural industry. Mr. Speaker, my distinguished colleague from Georgia (Mr. SCOTT) and I introduced this legislation because we recognize the similarities of what could result if sudden oak death disease continues to spread across the Nation in a similar fashion to that of the Dutch elm disease which devastated American forests and cities in the 1930s.

The bill would expand the U.S. Department of Agriculture's endeavors to halt the spread of the oak-destroying fungus Phytophthora ramorum and its harmful effect on America's oaks. Phytophthora ramorum invades susceptible trees through the bark, killing portions of the tree, creating an ideal environment for insects and other fungi to invade. Although primarily a west coast disease today, the sudden oak death disease has infected nurseries all across the United States and has recently made its way to Georgia through the sale of plants in the nursery industry killing over 100,000 oaks in the process, putting businesses in danger of closing and millions of trees at risk.

Our Nation's oak woodlands, urban forests, agricultural forestry and horticultural industries are all in jeopardy. The sudden oak death disease now affecting several States across our country has everyone waiting for something to be done to address this potentially disastrous problem. Sudden oak death negatively affects ecosystem functions, increases fire and safety hazards, and reduces property values in developed areas.

Over 7 million people lived where the initial outbreak occurred in the urban/wildland interface of central and coastal California. Neighborhoods were transformed within months. Dead trees surrounded communities where green trees formerly thrived. Communities were overwhelmed as residential yards, parks, open space and recreation areas were irreparably altered and in need of costly removal of thousands of hazardous trees.

The U.S. ornamental industry is valued at over $13 billion in annual sales, the third largest crop value in America. Georgia produces over $601 million in sales annually, and in my district alone, the 12th District of Georgia, we have $66 million in ornamental horticulture sales. Our nursery and horticultural interstate trade, international export markets, lumber companies and gardeners all will suffer a traumatic loss if we do not take action to prevent the spread of the sudden oak death disease.

We have seen the early stages of the sudden oak death disease and its capability of spreading far and wide. If we fail to stop this threat to our oak trees, the similar type of disease that caused catastrophic damage among Dutch elms over decades ago, the Dutch elm disease, will seem pale by comparison. Mr. Speaker, H.R. 4569 is bipartisan legislation that takes the necessary steps to combat this threat. We need our Secretary of Agriculture to immediately develop a plan to manage this disease that is rapidly spreading across our Nation.

I urge my colleagues to vote ''yes'' to protect our 21st century forests and our horticulture industry from the kind of devastation that we experienced in the 1930s with Dutch elm disease.

Mr. BOSWELL. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY).

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, I stand here because sudden oak death was first found in Marin County in my district in 1995. Since then, I have been working to control and contain this devastating disease, and I have been working with the gentleman from California (Mr. THOMPSON) as well because it is happening in our contiguous districts. It is good that we are here today to vote on this bipartisan bill, and it is something that I have been working on to get control over. But I am saddened that it has taken the spread of this disease to receive national interest.

Slowly but surely, as sudden oak death has spread through other communities, the Nation has come to understand the devastation that it causes and its need to be stopped. Sudden oak death is catching national attention as it has appeared for the first time in nurseries in southern California and nurseries in Oregon, and there is some serious concern that SOD has even spread to the southeastern part of the country. Nurseries in California are struggling with the quarantines that have been put in place on their plants in Canada and the State of Kentucky. In fact, quarantines of nurseries in Washington and Oregon are being considered at this very time.

But more tragic than that is what actually happens to the beautiful trees in an area that is affected by SOD and the resulting fire risks. It just brings tears to your eyes when you see these groups of trees disappearing.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that my colleagues join me in supporting this bill, H.R. 4569, to contain sudden oak death before it affects the entire country. Please do not wait until sudden oak death spreads to your community before you recognize the severity of this problem. I urge my colleagues to join all of us here today and vote for this important legislation.

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 4569, which would require the Secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture to develop a plan to control and manage Sudden Oak Death (SOD). Sudden Oak Death is an issue of significant concern to my constituents who live in San Luis Obispo County, and I thank Mr. BURNS and Chairman GOODLATTE for working with me to develop this legislation.

Oaks are a significant part of California's culture, and San Luis Obispo County is famous for its beautiful oak trees, particularly those along U.S. Highway 101. In fact, ''El Paso de Robles,'' which is the name of one of the cities located in the northern portion of the County, is literally translated ''the pass of the oaks.'' It also should be noted that oak trees provide pleasant vistas that encourage tourism, which is an important component of the California and San Luis Obispo County economies.

Unfortunately, oak trees are susceptible to a disease known as Sudden Oak Death, which is caused by the fungus-like pathogen Phytophthora ramorum, and for which there is currently no known cure or treatment. Rather, the standard regulatory practice is to quarantine the infected woodland area to reduce the likelihood of its further dispersal. However, quarantine efforts are not always effective because the disease is difficult to contain. Thus, while San Luis Obispo County is not among the thirteen California counties that are subject to such quarantines, I am interested in efforts to contain and combat Sudden Oak Death in order to ensure that Sudden Oak Death does not become established in San Luis Obispo County's environment.

In order to most effectively and efficiently combat Sudden Oak Death, we need to have a plan, and that plan should be derived from a careful analysis of what we have learned from our past efforts. As that is exactly what Mr. Burns' legislation would facilitate, I encourage my colleagues to join me as I work to see it enacted into law.

Mr. DICKS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 4569, a bill to provide for the development of a national plan for the control and management of Sudden Oak Death, a tree disease caused by the fungus-like pathogen Phytophthora ramorum.

In 1993, a fungus-like organism was found in Germany and the Netherlands on nursery-grown rhododendrons and viburnums. The disease was found to cause leaf blight, stem canker, and tip dieback. About the same time, oak trees in the San Francisco Bay Area were dying from similar symptoms and the disease began to be known as ''sudden oak death.''

Since that time, P. Ramorum has been found along the southeastern coast of the United States, California, Oregon and my home state of Washington. As of September 29, 2004, the total number of confirmed positive sites is 160 in 21 States. This disease invades susceptible trees and shrubs, including Douglas fir, through the bark, killing portions of the tree. This creates an ideal environment for insects and other fungi to invade.

Federal regulations were published February 14, 2002, to control the movement of sudden oak death from twelve infested counties in California and an area under eradication in Oregon. Research on Sudden Oak Death is currently being conducted by the Agriculture Research Service, U.S. Forest Service, Universities and others to better identify hosts, methods of detection, and effective treatments. Currently, 64 plants are regulated. There are no chemical treatments currently available to eliminate the disease in nursery stock.

H.R. 4569 is critical to the eradication of P. Ramorum. This bill allows the United States Department of Agriculture to develop the plan in consultation with other Federal agencies that have appropriate expertise regarding the control and management of Sudden Oak Death. I urge passage of this important bill.